

South gets fair share for projects

MADRAS, Feb. 25. Though the Mass Rapid Transit System (MRTS) for Madras has again been denied a substantial allocation for 1992-93, the Southern Railway has managed to secure a fair share in the sanctions for the on-going projects, as well as new schemes.

The major project to be launched in the coming year will be the electrification beyond Erode. In the first phase, the Railway Minister, Mr. C. K. Jaffer Sharief, has cleared the project up to Enakulam and the Cochin Harbour. For the Rs. 66-crore project, Rs. 7 crores has been released for the first year. It will also energise Coimbatore and Palakkad enroute.

The other development is on the gauge conversion front and as part of the massive programme towards the 'unigauge' goal, it has been decided to take up a broad gauge line from Dindigul to Tiruchirappalli along with the parallel BG line from Dindigul to Madurai and the already sanctioned gauge conversion towards Maniyachi and Tuticorin.

In this budget, the Railways have sanctioned

Rs. 20 crores for the on-going project, with the BG line slated for commissioning up to Madurai by June 1992. After that, the Southern Railway will continue gauge conversion works on the Maniyachi-Talaiyathu, Maniyachi-Milavattan and Milavattan-Tuticorin Harbour sections with these funds.

Disappointed: Railway sources here were, however, disappointed with the allocation of only Rs. 14 crores for the MRTS, which means the same level of progress as the current year. The Southern Railway was prepared to absorb up to Rs. 24 crores in the coming year.

In comparison, the Budget has released Rs. 14 crores for the Andheri project in Bombay and another Rs. 18 crores for the Belapur section, which is jointly funded by the Maharashtra Government. Calcutta's Metro Railway continues to take the lion's share in the metropolitan projects, with a release of Rs. 125 crores for the coming year.

For the new Chitradurg-Rayadurg line, now being laid, Rs. 17 crores has been sanctioned for 1992-93. But the Enakulam-Allapuzha-Kayan-

kulam project gets only Rs. 1 crore next year.

The south has secured a fair share in the new trains to be introduced with effect from July 1. Some of the important additions are superfast trains between Madras and Bangalore and Bombay and Bangalore. An inter-city express from Vijayawada to Madras has also been announced, in addition to a Mysore-Tirupati express.

Rajdhani Express: The first, prestigious Rajdhani Express to the south will now connect New Delhi with Secunderabad and Bangalore and will be only a weekly train. The Minister has promised to review the frequency after some time and also a similar weekly Rajdhani to connect Madras and Thiruvananthapuram with Delhi.

In the sphere of computerisation of passenger reservations this year, Mangalore and Tirupati have been included in the list of stations to be connected to the computer network.

Among the on-going projects slated for completion in 1992-93 are the electrification up to Erode and Bangalore from Jolarpet, the parallel BG line from Dindigul to Madurai, and the new line from Thrissur to Guruvayur.

ULFA meet decides on formal talks with Govt.

From Our Special Correspondent

GUWAHATI, Feb. 25. The much-awaited meeting of the Central General Council (CGC) of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) was held, according to several reports in the local press, on February 21 and 22 at an undisclosed location in Sonitpur district. Other sources too have confirmed the fact of such a meeting having taken place. These sources have also confirmed that ULFA's "commander-in-chief", Mr. Paresh Barua, was not present at the meeting.

However, the details of the deliberations of the CGC are not yet available except in sketchy reports in some newspapers. According to a report in *Dainik Asom*, the Assamese daily from Guwahati, a representative of Mr. Paresh Barua attended the meeting in which ULFA's Chairman, Mr. Arabindra Rajkhowa, was present, despite his recent injury in a motor accident.

The meeting only decided that further formal talks with the Government would be held.

These sketchy and in some ways contradictory reports have, however, not been confirmed by any independent or official source. Even the Chief Minister, Mr. Hiteswar Saikia, who is wont to be expansive in his carefully calculated "revelations" about organisational aspects of the ULFA, has for some time been very reticent.

Put briefly, the problem lies in the fact that it is extremely difficult for ULFA leaders to make a visible climbdown (despite the concessions they are supposed to have made in Delhi), except in a symbolic and purely formal sense, from their oft-stated objective of "Swadhin Asom"; and it is even more difficult for the Union Government to make any concession on these substantive issues. Indeed, so sensitive is the situation in Assam that even the assurances the ULFA leaders are believed to have given with regard to acceptance of the Constitution, abjuring of violence and surrender of weapons have become a contentious issue with a section of ULFA's rank and file and, rather more ominously, with influential underground supporters of the organisation.

Verma Commission pulls up Maragatham Chandrasekar

NEW DELHI, Feb. 25.

The Verma Commission, which is probing security lapses leading to the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, today passed strictures against the Sripurambudur MP, Mrs. Maragatham Chandrasekar (Cong-I), holding her responsible for not appearing in the hearing despite sufficient opportunities.

Mr. Justice J. S. Verma, chairman of the one-man-Commission, took exception to the absence of Mrs. Chandrasekar at the time of her cross-examination this afternoon. The consequence of Mrs. Chandrasekar, a notice under Section 8(B) of the Commission of Inquiry Act, not appearing for the hearing this afternoon "will accordingly ensue," the Judge said.

The Commission cross-examined Mr. Polur Varadan, MLA from Sripurambudur, who said he did not see any metal detector at the site of the Sripurambudur meeting on May 21 last year, where Rajiv Gandhi was killed in a bomb blast.

Mr. K. Karthikeyan, Chief of the Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the assassination submitted a video cassette on the security arrangements made at the venue.

The Commission, which on Monday directed Mrs. Chandrasekar to appear for the hearing today at any cost, accepted her counsel's plea that she be heard after lunch-break due to her high blood pressure and some other health problems. Mrs. Chandrasekar was present in the morning.

At the post-lunch sitting, when Mrs. Chandrasekar failed to make an appearance, the Judge passed the strictures saying she was given "enough time and enough opportunities" to appear for cross-examination.

The Commission has slated for hearing tomorrow, Mr. A. J. Doss, chief organiser of the Sripurambudur meeting, Ms. Latha Priyakumar, MLA and Mrs. Chandrasekar's daughter, Ms. Lakshmi Albert, a Mahila Congress(I) leader, and Ms. Rama Devi, District Collector.

During his cross-examination today, Mr. Polur Varadan, who was then a Congress(I) candidate

for the Assembly from Sripurambudur, said he was not among those who had invited Rajiv Gandhi for the election tour and was in no way connected with the arrangements at the meeting site.

Mr. Varadan said he did not see any metal detector at the meeting site. Nor was he asked by any police officials at any time to move away from near the dais.

Mr. Varadan said the Congress(I) election rally of May 21 was the first public meeting to be held at that venue, which was popularly known as the "temple land." He, along with three or four others including Mr. K. Ramamurthy, TNCCU president, Mr. A. J. Doss and a woman Ms. Sakubai, were standing on the dais when the explosion occurred.

Prior to May 21, Mr. Varadan said, he had visited the site only on May 19. On the fateful day, he stayed at the site from 10-30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and was "sitting beneath a tamarind tree," which he said was about 250 yards away from the spot where the dais was — PTI

Moderate turnout in Bombay civic poll

BOMBAY, Feb. 25.

Bombay city went to the polls today to elect 221 representatives to the Bombay Municipal Corporation. The elections are taking place after seven years.

Although there are 69,53,823 voters on the list, voting was moderate. Only in the suburbs, particularly in slum areas, brisk voting was witnessed from morning. In Central Bombay there was keen enthusiasm among voters.

In spite of a 30 per cent increase in the number of women voters, only a small number turned out to exercise their franchise.

The main parties in the field are the Congress(I), the BJP, the Shiv Sena, the Janata Dal, the Republican Party and a large number of Independents. — Our Special Correspondent

Rethinking on freight charges urged

MADRAS, Feb. 25.

The across-the-board increase of 7-5 per cent in freight rates and of four per cent on coal in the Railway budget for 1992-93 has come in for criticism from trade and industry.

The president of the Southern India Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mr. N. C. Krishnan, said the general freight increase would have a snowballing effect on prices at a time when the inflation rate was already in double-digits. The rise in the freight on coal coming on top of a hike in the coal price effected some time ago would affect bulk consumers of the fuel and electricity boards, thereby raising the cost of industrial products and power tariff, Mr. Krishnan said.

The steep increase in the minimum charge for parcels and luggage rates would also affect the common man indirectly, he said and called for a rethinking by the Ministry on the freight charges. He hoped that pending projects in Tamil Nadu such as the MRTS and the Dindigul-Madurai-Tuticorin gauge conversion would be expedited. The newly-introduced own-your-own-wagon and container schemes were steps in the right direction, he said.

Main cause of price spiral: The president of the Hindustan Chamber of Commerce, Mr. P. Obul Reddy, said "it is high time the Government realised that increases in rail and road transport charges were the main cause of the price spiral." The Railways could have generated surpluses by toning up efficiency and cutting down administrative expenditure. Increases in railway freights and fares had now become an annual feature, he said.

Mr. Reddy said while several new trains had been introduced, the much-expected superfast Rajdhani Express from Madras found no place in the budget speech. Conversion of the Madras-Tiruchi route into broadgauge had not been considered despite the growing passenger and freight traffic on this sector. No attempt had been made to reduce overcrowding in trains by introducing short-distance trains. Adequate funds had also not been allotted for the MRTS in Madras, Mr. Reddy said.

Exorbitant rates: Mr. N. Venkataramani, Chairman of the Madras Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said the increase in freight except on essential commodities and the four per cent hike in coal freight, coming on top of the increases

effected in the last two budgets 'have made railway freight rates really exorbitant' and the advantage of movement of cargo by rail compared to road transport had got substantially eroded. This was bound to have its effect on the prices of many commodities.

The increase in passenger fares without commensurate improvement in the quality of service and facilities to passengers would be resented by the public. While one appreciated the difficulties created for the Railways by increases in costs of inputs such as coal, power and diesel, the total revenue increase in freight and fares to the tune of Rs. 1,300 crores "is heavy by any standard," Mr. Venkataramani said.

He welcomed the proposal for treating zonal railways as profit centres and the schemes for containerisation and intra-modular traffic and the own-your-own wagon scheme.

Common man's misery: The president of the Sindh Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Hariram Chandani, said the Railways should have waited for the response from the private sector for participation in its developmental works before effecting big increases in freights and fares. The increases "will add to the misery of the common man." The Railways should have planned for greater operational efficiency and higher productivity instead of punishing railway users, Mr. Chandani said.

Mr. Ashok Kumbhat, president of the Tamil Nadu chapter of the All-India Tax Payers Association, commended the Railway Minister for the "quite a good performance" of the Railways during 1991-92 in respect of both freight and passenger traffic. While welcoming the proposal to introduce a Rajdhani Express from Bangalore and Secunderabad, he "wondered" why Madras alone among metropolitan cities had been deprived of the facility.

"Though some hike in passenger fares and freight was expected, the increase in respect of passenger fares is very steep and is bound to prove a burden on the middle class which is already experiencing the pressures of inflation," Mr. Kumbhat said. He said the Minister should have spared coal from any increase in tariff which would add to costs of production and prove inflationary.

Mr. K. V. Govinda Rao, President of the Andhra Chamber of Commerce, said the tariff propo-

sals would only push up transport costs and accentuate the price spiral. The Railway Minister would have done well to defer fare and freight increases and rely on economy, efficiency and productivity, he said. He welcomed the proposals to privatise catering and to introduce new trains.

Mr. R. K. Varadanarayana, President of the Tamil Chamber of Commerce, said the Railway Minister had presented a 'pleasant surprise' by announcing a moderate budget. It would have been still more welcome if the second-class fares had not been touched at all, as it affected the lower and middle classes who were already burdened with all-round price rise. "On the whole, the Minister should be congratulated for presenting a pragmatic budget," he said.

Computerised reservation in more stations

NEW DELHI, Feb. 25.

The Government proposes to extend computerised passenger reservation system to 12 new stations in 1992-93.

These include Mangalore, Tatanagar, Gwalior, Indore, Jabalpur, Shimla, Ludhiana, Tirupati, Bilawar, Vijayawada, Ranchi and Chandigarh, the Railway Minister, Mr. C. K. Jaffer Sharief stated while introducing the Rail Budget for 1992-93.

He said it was proposed to extend computer reservation facilities for inward and return journeys between Secunderabad and Delhi and Secunderabad and Secunderabad and Calcutta. — PTI

Suburban fare increase criticised

BOMBAY, Feb. 25.

The General Secretary of the Federation of Bombay Suburban Passengers' Association, Mr. B. Y. Lohokare, has criticised the steep increase in the passenger fare, particularly season ticket fare.

Railway Ministers have not been offering any relief to the hard-pressed commuters, particularly the season ticket fare. Even in the current budget, there is no concrete plan or proposal to improve the suburban services, he said. — Our Special Correspondent

Settling claims quickly is part of our pledge



LIC is fully committed to settling all maturity claims as quickly as possible. Last year 66% claims were settled on or before the date of maturity. Death claims too, were settled promptly. 1,60,777 claims worth Rs. 312.46 crores were settled within 75 days in 1990-91. Of the death claims reported, only a small fraction were repudiated — less than 1%, and even those are being reviewed.

Review committees have been constituted at 6 Zonal Offices — Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kanpur and Madras. The Zonal Committees review claims upto a limit of Rs. 1 lakh. Claims over that amount are reviewed by a Claims Review Committee at the Central Office, Bombay.

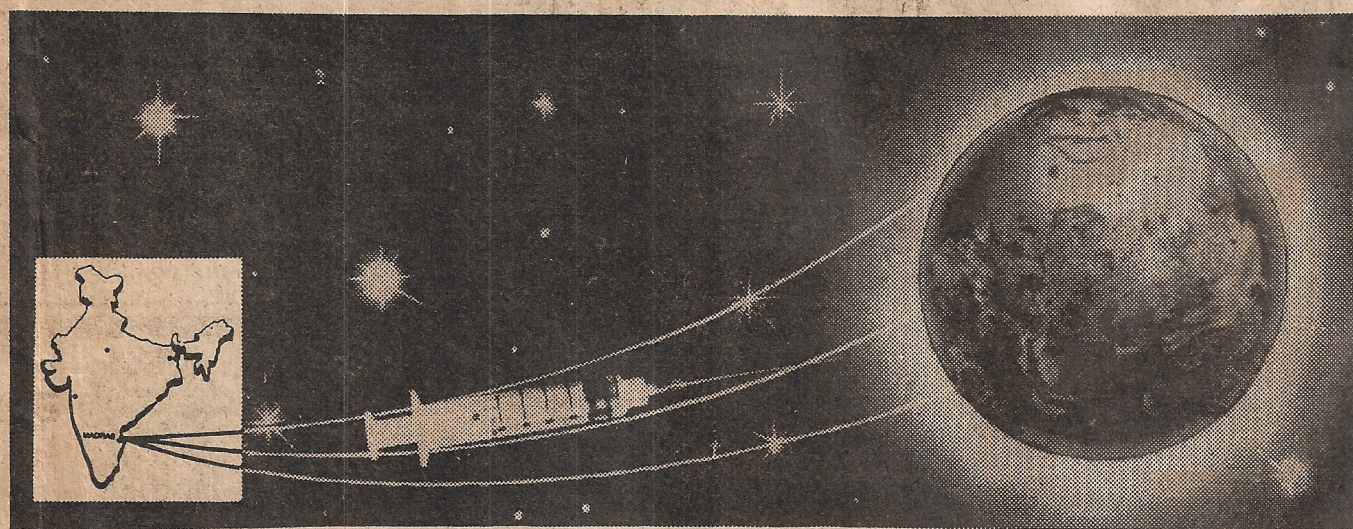
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PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- This unit set up in the Madras Export Processing Zone manufactures disposable syringes with a high degree of sterility.
- Plant and Machinery from Nakatani Sogyo Co, Japan includes automated moulding, needle setting and wrapping machines. Clean room equipment conforming to Class 10,000 of the FDA, USA specifications supplied by clean room specialists from Singapore.
- The product has 510K pre-marketing approval of FDA, USA for marketing in the USA.
- Marketing tie-up with M/s. Sidax Corporation, Malaysia, exporters of medical disposables world-wide. Plans for direct exports too.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ISSUE

- 100% Export Oriented Unit situated in a designated Export Processing Zone.
- Promoted by NRI professionals with considerable experience.
- Equity participation by All India Financial Institutions.
- Registered with FDA, USA and the products carry their pre-marketing approval; this does not, however, constitute product approval.
- Commercial production already commenced. No gestation period.
- Export profits exempt from tax. 80L, 80M and Wealth Tax benefits are also available to investors.
- Easy Liquidity - Listing at Madras, Bombay, Ahmedabad and Delhi Stock Exchanges.

RISK FACTORS

- Although the world market is very large - there is a heavy competition for the product from cheaper versions particularly from Taiwan and Korea.
- Any future change in Government policy regarding raw material imports for the purpose of export.
- Being working capital intensive, sufficient funds tie up required.
- The Company has not commissioned a formal market survey but has relied on its own sources of information. The international demand/supply position has not been fully established by an outside agency's survey. However the company has already achieved an export turnover of over Rs. 78 lacs.

MANAGEMENT PERCEPTIONS

- Better quality products with FDA, USA pre-marketing approval targeted at organised sector/institutional segment. Efforts underway to achieve economies of scale to make the product competitive.
- Due to Government's helpful approach towards export promotion, E.O.U.s may not face undue hardships. However, the company is also attempting indigenisation without compromising on quality specification.
- Being a 100% E.O.U., the company is confident of tying up additional export credit limits as and when required.
- The Management, based on its inhouse survey with reference to the data collected from Government and other sources, is satisfied with regard to market potential. The Company has started exporting which indicates a demand for the product.

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